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Paradigm Shift in Religious Education? A Reply to Gearon, or When Is a Paradigm Not a Paradigm?

The following is a response to Liam Gearon's reply (Gearon 2018) to my article in the *Journal of Beliefs and Values* which presented a critique of his use of Thomas Kuhn's concepts of paradigm, paradigm shift and incommensurability in his analysis of religious education (Jackson 2015a).

At the outset, it is important to reiterate that I did not question the shift in publicly-funded religious education over time from various forms of religious nurture to variations on the idea of educating about religions, some of which give attention to the personal development of students in addition to providing information. In this respect, I have referred frequently in my own work to influences resulting from processes of secularisation, pluralisation and globalisation (eg Jackson 2004; 2015a; 2018). Speaking generally, changes resulting from these influences have varied in a number of ways across countries, not least because they have interacted with some contrasting national histories of religion and state, and different experiences in relation to migration. Thus, in various European states, there has been a transition in state education from forms of religious education, in which religious beliefs and values are transmitted to young people (sometimes called faith-based, formative or confessional approaches), towards types of inclusive religious education, in which young people from various religious and non-religious family backgrounds learn together about religious, and sometimes also non-religious, diversity. In some national contexts varieties of 'inclusive' and 'faith-based' religious education are found within the same education system. Thus, I concur with Jean-Paul Willaime's analysis, quoted with approval by Gearon (Willaime 2007).ⁱ

My purpose in writing the *JBV* article was specifically to give a critique of Liam Gearon's use of the terminology of 'paradigm', 'paradigm shift' and 'incommensurability', derived from Thomas Kuhn's work in the philosophy of science (eg Kuhn 1962, 1970, 1996). In that article (Jackson 2015a), I noted that Thomas Kuhn, in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, uses the term 'paradigm' to correspond to 'universally recognised scientific achievements that, for a time, provide model problems and solutions for a community of practitioners' (Kuhn 1996, 10). Kuhn refers to what he calls periods of 'normal science', when a current view of reality is dominant for a significant time, and then 'revolution' when that view undergoes dramatic change. This is what Kuhn calls a 'paradigm shift'. Once a new paradigm is accepted, the inadequacy of the earlier paradigm becomes clear. In Kuhn's terms, scientific theories from different paradigms are 'incommensurable' since they are expressed within contrasting conceptual frameworks whose 'languages' lack sufficient overlap to allow meaningful comparison of the theories, or to use empirical evidence to support one theory against the other. In chemistry, for example, the acceptance of Lavoisier's theory of chemical reactions and combustion in place of the 'Phlogiston' theory is an example of a 'paradigm shift'. Both theories *cannot* be embraced at the same time; they are incommensurable. For Kuhn, a paradigm is not simply a theory, but implies the adoption of an entire conceptual scheme.

Kuhn did modify his view of incommensurability, following criticisms that his account made comparison of alternative paradigms impossible (eg Kuhn 1981, 1983). This included the

development of a linguistic theory of scientific revolutions (the theory of kinds), a cognitive exploration of the language learning process (the analogy of bilingualism), and an epistemological discussion on the rationality of scientific development (the evolutionary epistemology). However, despite these modifications to his original view, ‘incommensurability’ for Kuhn still implied ‘incompatibility’.

In Gearon’s account, the emergence of the natural and social sciences, and distinctive approaches to philosophy, during the European Enlightenment, entailed reductionist explanations of religion. Thus, studies of religion became separated from ‘the religious life’ as, later, did religious education. Gearon identifies a series of pedagogies related to religious education as presented by various recent writers in the field. He uses Kuhn’s term ‘paradigm’ to characterise these approaches, distinguishing all of them from what is often called religious nurture or faith-based religious education (Gearon 2013, 101). Gearon concedes that, since both the religious and the secular have persisted, ‘we cannot say from the Enlightenment there was a paradigm shift from religious to secular understandings of the world... because both have persisted’ (Gearon 2013, 103). Nevertheless, he continues to employ the terms ‘paradigm’ and ‘incommensurability’ in relation to his account of religious education.

In my critique of Gearon, I point out the confusing nature of his account. First, he distinguishes between *two* paradigms – namely, initiation into ‘the religious life’, and, collectively, all other approaches utilising what he calls ‘paradigmatic disciplines’, derived from the social sciences, psychology and contemporary philosophy. Next, he goes on to divide the second paradigm into *five separate* paradigms, each associated with a particular ‘paradigmatic discipline’ (2013, 105). These he identifies as scriptural-theological, phenomenological, psychological-experiential, philosophical-conceptual, socio-cultural and historical-political. Gearon had already indicated Kuhn’s meaning of ‘paradigm’ and ‘paradigm shift’, so one would have expected him to use these terms with the same sense as Kuhn. However, Gearon now clarifies – at least in relation to the five paradigms he associates with the social sciences, psychology and contemporary philosophy – that he is not using the term ‘paradigm’ in *exactly* the same way as Kuhn. With regard to the five paradigms, Gearon says (in his reply to my article):

... no discipline or intellectual tradition is so closely bounded as to preclude inter- and cross-disciplinary overlap and so made it evident that in professional practice a plethora of religious education pedagogies will include inter-disciplinary fusions. (Gearon 2018, p.*)

Later Gearon also states:

Paradigms can be mixed and matched in the social sciences, as they are in religious education, without detracting from a sense of paradigmatic status. (Gearon 2018, p.)

Moreover, Gearon writes:

... there is here an enduring difficulty of comparison of theoretical perspectives, or what is known as ‘incommensurability’, which it is important to say does not mean different theories are entirely incompatible but that they share different orientations or outlooks. (Gearon 2018, p.)

Thus, claims Gearon – at least in certain contexts – ‘paradigms’ can be mixed and matched, and ‘incommensurability’ does not imply incompatibility. Yet, in his book aimed at student-teachers and teachers of religious education, Gearon actually *equates* ‘incommensurability’ with ‘deep incompatibility’. Gearon writes the following, with regard to the relationship between his scriptural-theological paradigm and the other paradigms he identifies:

‘Deep incompatibility between old and new or incommensurability becomes apparent...’ (Gearon 2013a, 104) (my italics).

A key question is why Gearon persists in using Kuhn’s language. In arguing that his usage of Kuhn’s terminology is highly questionable, I conclude that Gearon’s use of terms such as ‘paradigm’ and ‘incommensurability’ serves to identify religious education scholars with a specific paradigm, and to *separate* pedagogical and research approaches which are in principle and in practice complementary. In effect, Gearon uses Kuhn’s terminology as a tool for segregation. The following points exemplify the possibilities for ‘religious nurture’ and ‘inclusive religious education’ to be compatible processes, and illustrate the complementary nature of various religious education pedagogies.

Two Paradigms?

In the case of the supposed paradigm shift from the ‘scriptural-theological’ (with religious education understood as religious nurture or formation), to religious education (broadly understood as developing an understanding of religious diversity), neither process *is* a paradigm in the sense used by Thomas Kuhn. If it were so, then the activity of religious nurture would no longer have made sense, and would have been superseded. The reality is that there are two distinct processes which, in the context of the history of education in England, have been called, in law, by the same name – ‘religious education’. Both activities continue to be meaningful; both are publicly justifiable in different contexts; and there is a relationship between them.

There are various approaches to religious nurture or faith-based religious education, which can be placed in two broad categories, one seeing inclusive forms of religious education which teach about religious diversity as a threat, the other seeing at least some forms of inclusive religious education as complementary to faith-based education. Thus, there are examples of those who regard inclusive approaches to religious education as imposing a view of theological pluralism, or who denigrate, as inherently secularist, approaches utilising theory or method from the social sciences. However, others working in the context of religious nurture, or faith-based approaches to religious education, adopt a very positive stance towards religious diversity, without necessarily adopting a pluralist theological stance (eg Geiger, 2016). Thus, there is some significant overlap between certain approaches to faith-based nurture and impartial approaches to religious education which introduce students from a variety of backgrounds to religious diversity.

For example, writing from a Catholic context in the USA, Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran identify religious education as being concerned both with teaching young people to practise a religious way of life, and enabling them to understand religion(s) – the latter considered a task which starts from an understanding of one’s own religion, but which also involves comparison and engagement with others (Harris & Moran, 1998). Various contributions to

Castelli and Chater (2018) also emphasise *overlap* between inclusive religious education and outward-looking denominational approaches, drawing attention to the importance of on-going dialogue. For example, Andrew Lewis, writing from a Catholic perspective in the UK, explores how a Catholic view of ‘good RE’ might cohere with the broader view of the subject held by those working in inclusive schools (Lewis 2018). In his own chapter, based on research conducted in England, Mike Castelli discusses the process of dialogue in both religious nurture and a pluralistic and inclusive religious education, arguing that *all* teaching should follow the dispositions and procedures of humility, seriousness, hesitation, imagination and articulation (Castelli 2018).

Sandra Cullen, in her work on religious education in Ireland, draws on various sources to present religious education in Catholic schools as an on-going conversation between religious nurture in the private sphere and religious education in the public sphere (Cullen, 2017). These sources include Thomas Groome’s idea of ‘appropriation’ – the interaction of the self with the religious tradition that allows for the appropriation of the tradition to the living faith of the individual – (Groome 1991), Bert Roebben’s view that learning should involve ‘a comprehensive and integrated conversation with fellow learners concerning their own religious experiences, religious questions, and with the possible insights found in traditions and cultures’ (Roebben & Warren 2001), and my own idea of ‘edification’ (Jackson 1997; 2018).

With regard to Islam, Abdullah Sahin has argued persuasively for collaborations between Islamic education and forms of inclusive religious education found in state-funded schools in the UK (eg Sahin 2010). Summer schools for Islamic educators, directed by Sahin and held at the University of Warwick (for example, in 2016 and 2017), explore complementary elements and constructive connections between Muslim education in Islamic settings and inclusive religious education as taught in publicly-funded community schools. As Sahin observes:

Without a readiness on the part of all faith communities to explore together the common ground upon which reasoned faith and understanding can be encouraged through RE, a crucial community resource for peace, reconciliation and cooperation will be neglected, possibly even lost. (Sahin 2010, 173)

Moreover, research conducted by Bill Gent and Jenny Berglund with young Muslims in the UK, who experience both religious nurture in Islamic settings and inclusive religious education in their day school, affirms a constructive relationship between the two experiences (Berglund and Gent 2016; Gent 2005; 2018).

These various ideas show the presence and importance of a continuing dialogue between those concerned with religious education in different sectors of education. All of these examples contradict Gearon’s classification of forms of religious nurture and varieties of education about religious diversity as incommensurable and incompatible ‘paradigms’ in the sense used by Thomas Kuhn.

In my own work on religious education in ‘inclusive’ schools, I advocate an approach which recognises and accepts diversity and difference in relation to religions and beliefs, and specifically in relation to the differences of belief and commitment of students and teachers in classrooms. In considering issues concerning human rights, I argue for a position of

‘dialogical liberalism’, promoting dialogue and discussion, rather than imposing equality. I argue that, at the level of social and political interaction within a society or wider grouping, basic human rights – as described in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – can provide a set of provisional moral principles, derived from reflecting on the idea of democracy itself, relevant to dialogue between those holding different views (eg Jackson 2018, Chapter 12).

Five paradigms?

Gearon subdivides non-faith-based religious education into five paradigms, namely phenomenological (grounded in phenomenology); psychological-experiential (psychology); philosophical-conceptual (philosophy); socio-cultural (sociology); and historical-political (politics) (Gearon 2013a, 105). There are various reasons for questioning this paradigms model.

First, scholars identified by Gearon with a particular paradigm do not necessarily share the same views concerning the nature of religious education and its pedagogy.

Particular scholars are identified by Gearon with each of the five paradigms that he distinguishes from ‘initiation into the religious life’. For example, Harold Loukes, Ronald Goldman, Edwin Cox, Leslie Francis, Clive Erricker and Jane Erricker are among those mentioned by Gearon in relation to the so-called psychological-experiential paradigm. However, although each of these have used psychology (usually developmental psychology) in their research, some of them have views of the nature of religious education that are different from one another. For example, Ronald Goldman and Harold Loukes both maintained a view of religious education as a form of Christian nurture, while Edwin Cox wrote about the changing aims of religious education, arguing for a combination of education about religions and personal engagement by students with issues arising from such study (eg Cox 1966, 1967, 1983).

Leslie Francis has for many years used developmental psychology in wide-ranging research studies (recent examples include Francis and Penny, 2017; Francis, Penny and McKenna, 2017; Francis, Penny and Robbins, 2017), but he also combines an interest in processes of religious nurture within religions, with religious education understood as an open approach to the study of religions in schools, inclusive of students from diverse religious and non-religious backgrounds. Francis contributed to the joint statement on the nature of religious education in inclusive schools submitted to the Religious Education Commission in the UK by the staff from Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (WRERU) at the University of Warwick (WRERU 2017). This took the view that national policies should include educational activity that promotes an understanding of religion(s) – including the language, experience and values of religious people – for various reasons, both intrinsic to the nature of education, and instrumental to the benefit of individuals and society.

Clive and Jane Erricker adopt a very different view from all the above in arguing that the subject should focus solely on enabling pupils to develop their own personal worldviews. Gearon uses the work of the Errickers to illustrate his so-called psychological-experiential paradigm. However, the emphasis on the personal worldviews of students in their work is *not* derived from any influence from psychology, but relates to their post-modernist philosophical

stance, which rejects ‘grand narratives’ – powerful, generic representations of religions – and focuses on young people’s ‘personal narratives’ (Erricker and Erricker 2000; Jackson 2004).

The examples above illustrate that the use of and commitment to a particular discipline in research does not necessarily determine the view of the nature of religious education of the person using it, and therefore questions Gearon’s paradigms theory.

Second, various scholars identified by Gearon with each of the five paradigms draw on a variety of disciplines in articulating their work on religious education; their work is not confined to the single discipline identified by Gearon as paradigmatic.

For example, although Edwin Cox is mentioned by Gearon in relation to the psychological-experiential paradigm, his work was not related solely to psychology and he drew on a variety of disciplines in his writing, including philosophy, sociology and history as well as psychology (Greer 1985). Cox actually identified his main discipline as philosophy, and, indeed, chose to teach the philosophy of religion and ethics on the BA degree course in religious education at the University of Warwick, which he did until his final illness (Jackson 1991).

Ninian Smart employed other disciplines in addition to phenomenology in his view of religious education, recommending, for example, the use of philosophy by older students for critical discussion of issues such as the truth claims of religions (Smart 1965). Brian Gates, who (with the present author and others) worked closely with Smart in the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education, observes that:

Ninian Smart is wrongly branded as a ‘phenomenologist’. He certainly recognised the worth of ‘empathy’ and the scholar’s need to take account of his/her own world view. He was also keen to map the different manifestations of religion as expressive of human meaning, demonstrating the enthusiasm of an empirical realist making critical sense of what he found. But his own academic portfolio contained the multiple skills of being, e.g. a Christian theologian, a historian of religions, a philosopher of religion, and a Buddhologist. (Gates 2016, 26)

Andrew Wright’s approach to religious education is identified by Gearon as *the* philosophical paradigm. However, Wright employs a very specific ‘critical realist’ philosophical position, regarding linguistic competence rather than ‘experience’ as the basis for understanding religions (eg Wright 1996, 167). Yet different forms of philosophy are also used in a variety of ways by writers on religious education – such as Edwin Cox, Ninian Smart, Clive Erricker and myself – identified by Gearon as working within other paradigms.

Gearon represents my own work as entirely based on ethnography, seeing ‘the object lesson of religious education as creating ethnographic, cultural explorers’ (Gearon, 2014, 65). I do use techniques from a particular approach to ethnography in helping students to grasp the religious meanings of others. However, this is combined with work from social psychology on group theory (eg Jackson 1997, 65) and also uses methods from hermeneutical philosophy (eg Jackson 1997, 129; 2004, 92-94; 2017b; 2018, Chapter 5) in helping students to engage critically with their learning. There is also an existential element in the interpretive approach, concerned with personal, including spiritual, development, in which all participants are encouraged to relate their learning to their own personal worldview. This involves ‘learners reassessing their understanding of their own way of life (being edified through reflecting on

another's way of life)' (Jackson 2004, 88). This might, for example, be a religious worldview. In John Hull's terms, such students are encouraged 'to do theology' as part of their involvement in religious education. Further, I present the interpretive approach as complementary to various other approaches (eg Jackson 2004, 109-125), and have always seen it as a combination of methods, and have encouraged its creative adaptation and development by others (eg Iversen 2013; Jackson 2004, 87-108; Kvamme 2017). The claim that the interpretive approach is solely concerned with creating 'ethnographic, cultural explorers' is simply false.

Third, Gearon's association of the work of religious education scholars, linked by him to specific paradigms, with the secularist stances of founding thinkers in the social sciences is highly questionable.

For example, Gearon refers specifically to Durkheim, as a founding father of sociology, as part of his critique of my work on the interpretive approach. However, to claim that *all* subsequent work in sociology and related fields is inherently secularist because of the *origins* of the family of disciplines it utilizes ignores historical and on-going diversity of theory within fields such as social anthropology, including continuing debates by those who work in these areas concerning their nature and their assumptions. With regard to ethnography, for example, although there have been attempts to accommodate ethnographic methods to the natural sciences (eg Radcliffe-Brown 1958), and attempts to interpret ethnographic material politically through the use of Marxist social conflict theory which *do* show an anti-religious bias, others have seen ethnography as one of the humanities or arts. For example, the anthropologist Edward Evans-Pritchard – himself a Catholic convert – rejected the view that anthropology is a natural science, arguing that it should be placed amongst the humanities (e.g. Evans-Pritchard 1961). Other ethnographers have gone further. In different ways, especially utilising literary theory and European philosophy, ethnographers such as Victor Turner, Mary Douglas, Edmund Leach, Clifford Geertz and Barbara Myerhoff have emphasised artistic elements in ethnographic interpretation. In Geertz's case, his method is deeply influenced by the hermeneutical philosophy espoused by Paul Ricoeur (Geertz 1973) utilising Ricoeur's concept of 'textualisation' (Ricoeur 1971). Geertz's data analysis consists in getting a sense of the 'culture' as a generality through its parts, and in relation to each part – each 'symbol', whether it be a word, image, institution or behaviour – by considering it in relation to the whole (Geertz 1983, 69). This is a version of what Dilthey (in applying a technique from Schleiermacher's Biblical work to the social sciences) called the hermeneutic circle. For Geertz this method is central to ethnographic interpretation, just as it is in other forms of interpretation, such as literary, historical, psychoanalytic or Biblical. For Geertz, understanding someone else's way of life is akin to interpreting a poem (Geertz 1983, 70), requiring creativity and imagination. It is an adapted form of this method that is central to the concept of interpretation in the interpretive approach (Jackson 1997, 30-48). This is very distant from Durkheim's view of religion as represented in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (Durkheim 1912).

Paradigms as a Tool for Separation

Despite his statement about not precluding inter-disciplinarity, and his view that ‘paradigms can be mixed and matched’ Gearon employs Kuhn’s terminology as a tool for *separation* – for separating specific approaches to religious education and for confining individuals within a so-called paradigm. For example, Gearon’s presents the European Commission-funded REDCo project (*Religion in Education: a Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries?*) as a notable example of his historical-political paradigm. Gearon uses his paradigms theory to identify a particular group of religious education researchers specifically with a narrowly-stated view of religious education, ignoring aspects of their work which evidence their contributions to wider discussions and debates concerning both faith-based and ‘inclusive’ forms of religious education. Members of the REDCo project team researched the views of samples of 14-16 year old students in state-funded schools in eight European countries on teaching and learning about religious diversity. Collectively, they are portrayed by Gearon as subscribing to a *single* ‘historical-political’ aim for religious education, *solely* to reduce conflict and promote tolerance.

Religion in education serves the principles of liberal democracy in responding to a culturally and religiously diverse populace. Teaching and learning in this model is directed towards ameliorating any potential conflicts inherent amidst such pluralism. (Gearon 2013a, 132)

Such historical-political approaches, he says, ‘underplay historical and contemporary conflict and difference, emphasising commonalities in order to reach the political liberal goal of tolerance and understanding...’ (Gearon 2013a, 133). The project team is presented as sharing the same views, and promoting a single goal. The diversity of the team and its range of disciplinary perspectives is ignored by Gearon. The project included educational researchers from universities in Germany, England, Norway, Estonia, France, Spain, the Russian Federation and the Netherlands. These researchers included Protestant, Catholic and Russian Orthodox Christians, a Muslim and others not identifying with a specific religion or secular humanism, but having a variety of personal worldviews. The researchers had a range of research and academic specialisms, including philosophy, psychology, theology, sociology and ethnography, all of which were employed in the project’s work.

It does not follow from REDCo’s focus on a ‘social’ issue – learning about and discussing religious diversity in classroom contexts – that the researchers subscribed to a *single* ‘historical-political’ aim for religious education. For example, social aims are closely inter-related with *personal* views and commitments. Addressing the ‘personal development’ of students was an explicit REDCo aim, as Wolfram Weisse makes clear (eg Weisse, 2008, 5).

Furthermore, in my chapter in the REDCo project’s first book, I wrote:

... there is no intention to imply that the study of religion in schools should be solely justified through attention to social and political events and issues. I agree with the Delors Report in considering that education should include learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be (UNESCO, 1996). It is arguable that

religious education should be concerned with all of these, especially the fourth.
(Jackson, 2007, 28)

Rather than being presented as a group of empirical researchers with a range of skills and disciplinary backgrounds, Gearon asserts a relationship between the political agenda of the European Commission (as a funding body) and the REDCo team.ⁱⁱ Thus, Gearon *suggests* a willingness on the part of the researchers to ensure that their findings, and associated educational recommendations, match the perceived political goals of those funding the research.

There are of course unexplored questions here about how sound the findings are of the research itself. This is not in any sense to question the academic integrity of the research, but the close congruence of funding by political institutions committed to diversity management and research findings, which provide ready-made pedagogical strategies to achieve these political goals, raises issues of independence between funding and findings. (Gearon, 2013a, p. 36)

By using suggestion, Gearon manages both to imply what amounts to an unprofessional relationship between the funding body and the researchers, and to question the soundness of the research findings while, rhetorically, denying that he is doing this.

Moreover, Gearon links the historical-political paradigm to the philosophy of political liberalism and to John Hick's theology of religious pluralism, thus associating the whole REDCo team with a specific theological stance.

The philosophical-theological counterpart of political liberalism in regard to religion is a theological notion of religious pluralism in which all religions represent cultural variations of one ultimate reality... this seemingly radical view of the essential truth of all religions is one which, after some past decades of curricula (*sic*) experimentation, has come to be held by many religious education professionals and religious education policy. (Gearon 2013a, 134)

Gearon offers no evidence to support the claim that many religious education professionals have personal views which are consistent with Hick's view of religious pluralism, and no evidence that Hick's theologically pluralistic view is reflected in religious education policy.

Gearon associates Hick's pluralistic theology closely with political liberalism.

Political liberalism – as the political counterpart of this theology – though it is unconcerned with religious truth(s), operates *de facto* as if all religions were equally true; or rather as if the adherents of these traditions are legally entitled to hold that the truths of their traditions are true. (Gearon 2013a, 134)

Gearon's view of political liberalism is central to his critique of REDCo and his view of the politicisation of religious education. However, the stance of political liberalism shared by many REDCo researchers, is very different and is consistent with the position presented by the philosopher John Rawls. Rawls distinguishes between comprehensive and political

liberalism (Rawls 1993), the former referring to the right of individuals to hold the religious or philosophical stance of their choice, and the latter designating the challenge, faced by those holding different religious and philosophical views, to find ways of living together peacefully within democratic societies, despite what may be deep differences of belief. Sometimes they have to agree to differ about their beliefs. On other occasions, they may be able to achieve a degree of what Rawls calls ‘overlapping consensus’. This does *not* involve changing their commitments or adopting a shared pluralistic theology.

Gearon’s presentation of political liberalism is quite different. According to Gearon, political liberalism ‘is unconcerned with religious truths’, but ‘operates *de facto* as if all religions were equally true; or rather as if the adherents of these traditions are legally entitled to hold that the truths of their traditions are true’. There is confusion here. Political liberalism does acknowledge that individuals are ‘entitled to hold that the truths of their traditions are true’, but it does *not* operate as if all religions are equally true. Rather, it recognises that, since no religion can establish the truth of its claims publicly, religions should be treated impartially in the discourse of democratic institutions.

In summary, REDCo researchers are presented by Gearon as having a single aim (promoting tolerance), reflecting a shared view of religious pluralism, in which all religions are regarded as equally true, and minimising issues of conflict (Gearon 2013a, 134). This is a misrepresentation. Although the project focused on dialogue, its researchers did not share a common view that religious education should *only* be concerned with promoting tolerance. Moreover, members of the REDCo team were from diverse religious and non-religious backgrounds. The idea that there was a shared view of religious pluralism, or that the project team promoted ideas of religious pluralism, is untrue.

With regard to Gearon’s accusation of avoiding issues of conflict, examples from REDCo research on classroom interaction, across eight European countries, illustrate how issues of serious conflict – including religious conflict – might be handled in classrooms in a civil way (Skeie 2008). For example, Kevin O’Grady’s didactical approach, using drama in a school in England, addressed conflict issues (O’Grady, 2013). Fedor Kozyrev, working in the Russian Federation, analysed videotaped examples of topics about religion and conflict issues in the classroom, highlighting the importance of the teacher’s adaptability to address conflict issues through dialogue (Kozyrev, 2009, 215). Marie von der Lippe’s Norwegian research shows how conflict can be generated by some media representations of religious material, and she suggests strategies for addressing this in the classroom (von der Lippe, 2009; 2010). These are not examples in which conflict is ‘filtered out’ or ‘profound differences are not taken seriously’. Rather, the goal was to provide ‘safe space’ for civil exchange. As Olga Schihalejev observes, in reporting her classroom research in Estonia: ‘If the student recognises that security is available and trust has been built up, he or she will risk entering into conflict or vulnerable areas rather than avoiding them or utilizing uncontrolled ways to deal with them’ (Schihalejev, 2010, p. 177). The example of the REDCo project illustrates how Gearon’s placement of a group of researchers within a particular ‘paradigm’ stereotypes and distorts their research findings.ⁱⁱⁱ

Gearon's Summary Points

Towards the end of my *JBV* article, I made a number of points summarising my criticisms of Gearon's paradigms theory. Gearon responds to these towards the end of his article. For example, he says:

Documents such as the OSCE (2007) *Guidelines* are political and security in origin and intention and offer both political rationale and nascent pedagogy. By this I mean that the OSCE's foray into curriculum territory marks a beginning of if a not yet developed pedagogy informed by political motivations (Gearon 2018, p.).

In his book, Gearon adopts Michael Grimmitt's view of a pedagogy as 'a theory of teaching and learning encompassing aims, curriculum content and methodology' (Grimmitt 2000, 8; Gearon 2013, 104). The OSCE as an institution proposes no such theory of pedagogy. Elsewhere, I have clarified that no employees of the OSCE and, in particular, its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), under whose auspices the document was written, had any involvement in writing or determining the view of pedagogy contained within the *Toledo Guiding Principles* (Jackson 2015b). The document was produced collaboratively by an international team of academics, mainly working in education, law and religion, none of whom were members of staff of the OSCE or the ODIHR, with members making contributions based their own expertise. They were from diverse religious and non-religious backgrounds, and those from religious backgrounds did not share common theological ideas (they included, for example, a Russian Orthodox archpriest, an imam, a rabbi and a member of the Church of the Latter-Day Saints). Moreover, members of the team did not see the aims and purposes of studying religions in schools as *only* to promote tolerance and social cohesion. The suggestion that the OSCE (as the publisher) itself offers 'a nascent pedagogy' for religious education – and as Gearon claims elsewhere, that the document 'brings military and security concerns into the classroom' (Gearon 2012, 231) – misrepresents both the process of developing and writing the *Toledo Guiding Principles*, and the content of the document. Members of the writing team shared with colleagues in the ODIHR (and indeed with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief) a commitment to the principle of freedom of religion or belief as a social argument for justifying the study of religions and other worldviews in publicly funded schools. However, this is not a formulation of a *pedagogy*, nor is it the only argument embraced by members of the writing team.

Gearon's next three points all reflect the confusion engendered by his use of the term 'paradigm'. He uses the term to imply incommensurability, and therefore *incompatibility*, in the case of the scriptural-theological in relation to the rest of those he identifies. But he also identifies as paradigms five approaches for which he claims that incommensurability does *not* imply incompatibility. As argued above, these five are *not* paradigms in the sense in which the term is used by Thomas Kuhn. Gearon claims that these five paradigms can be 'mixed and matched'. For Gearon, incommensurability, in these cases, does not imply incompatibility. I have argued the view that Gearon employs the term 'paradigm' in relation to these approaches as a tool for 'separation', as in the case of his discussion of the REDCo project.

Moreover, by the use of suggestion and with selective reference to my publications, Gearon attempts to turn my critique of his paradigms model into a *specific* defence of the interpretive

approach to religious education, which he associates entirely with the promotion of social cohesion.

The evidence from Jackson's work...would seem to suggest that one of the chief advantages of the interpretive approach is that it can be used for such purposes (*i.e. promoting social cohesion*). (Gearon 2018 p.)

The interpretive approach did emerge from the experience of fieldwork with religious communities, together with reflection on that activity in relation to ideas from an eclectic group of researchers from ethnography, theology, cultural studies, social psychology and hermeneutical philosophy (Jackson, 1997; 2004; 2018). However, it has never been associated by me with the single aim of promoting social cohesion. Religious education, in the interpretive approach, discusses issues of *representing* religions and religious activity, and considers the hermeneutical relationship between individuals, groups to which they belong and the generic religious tradition. It helps students, whatever their background, to *interpret* the meanings of those who express religious language or perform religious actions such as rituals, and it draws on techniques from hermeneutics in doing this. Interpretation also involves considering the relationship of individuals, groups and the generic religions. Moreover, religious education includes a *reflexive* element. To increase understanding, pupils need to reflect on the impact of new learning on their previous understanding. Thus, reflexivity covers various aspects of the relationship between the experience of students and of those whose way of life they are attempting to interpret. These include: learners re-assessing their own preconceptions, derived from their own tradition or worldview – termed *edification* (Jackson, 1997, 130-1; 2004, 88); making a distanced critique of material studied; discussing their responses with peers and the teacher; and conducting retrospective reviews of study methods. The interpretive approach thus provides a methodology for *understanding* uses of religious language and *reflecting* on these. I argue that such a form of religious education is intrinsically worthwhile, as part of an education which introduces students to all 'realms of meaning' (Phenix 1964) or areas of human experience, and is instrumentally worthwhile both in providing opportunities for students' *personal* development, *and* contributing to their social development through helping to equip them for life in rapidly changing societies (eg Jackson 2015a).

Conclusion

I wrote my article replying to Gearon's use of Thomas Kuhn's terminology as part of standard academic practice. Any frustration (rather than 'ire') that can be detected in my response does not result from engagement in any 'paradigm wars'. It results partly from my disappointment in Gearon's own shift in position in his more recent work, partly from the fact that his ideas are presented uncritically as *the* story of religious education, its history and contemporary manifestation, in an introductory text for students and teachers of the subject, and because his account emphasises 'separation'. The emphasis is on difference and opposition, rather than collaboration – especially between the processes of faith-based and 'inclusive' religious education. Instead of offering a variety of perspectives on the issues concerned that can be discussed and evaluated by students – as, for example, is done well in Castelli and Chater's *We Need to Talk about Religious Education* (Castelli and Chater 2017) – or discussing and identifying a range of key ideas for exploration by students and teachers

of ‘inclusive’ RE – as in Barbara Wintersgill’s *Big Ideas for Religious Education* (Wintersgill 2017) – Gearon presents his analysis of paradigms as the definitive account.^{iv}

Finally, Gearon’s preoccupation with the framing of religious education by those involved in its theory and practice omits attention to a variety of pressing issues faced by the subject. For Gearon, defects in the subject are associated with aspects of scholars’ and researchers’ work, sometimes suggesting their naivety or lack of professionalism, or emphasising the idea that individuals promote particular so-called paradigms while marginalising or excluding others.

He does not address other issues, which are genuine current threats to ‘inclusive’ religious education and to the dynamics of classroom interaction, which are not derived from commitments to a specific approach to teaching the subject. These include: an over-emphasis on numeracy and literacy to the detriment of subjects such as the arts and religious education (eg Jackson 2018); a shortage of graduates going into teaching who have specialisms in religious studies or theology, sometimes resulting in the misrepresentation by teachers of the religious positions of class members (eg Commission on Religious Education 2017; Francis, Penny and McKenna 2017; Moulin 2011); and insufficient time given to the training of teachers to deal with *both* the promotion of knowledge and understanding, *and* the development of skills for the management of civil classroom dialogue (eg Jackson 2014; Kittelmann Flensner 2015; Osbeck and Lied 2012; von der Lippe 2009, 2010). Moreover, various research studies show how factors related to national, regional and local *contexts* are a strong factor in determining perceptions of secularity and secularism in religious education classrooms, a point not considered by Gearon (e.g Arweck, 2017; Knauth et al., 2008; ter Avest et al., 2009). Of course, those involved in inclusive religious education should be vigilant in avoiding manipulation by anyone setting out to promote interests unrelated to the aims of the subject. However, *collaboration* of researchers from relevant disciplinary fields, teachers and policymakers, and *communication* among them, are vital to the improvement of practice, and to supporting policy development which reflects a common understanding of the subject’s aims.

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ⁱ Gearon quotes David Lewin's comments on the debate between Gearon and myself (Lewin 2017). Lewin acknowledges that my response to Gearon was written for the specific purpose of correcting inaccuracies in Gearon's account, and he states that my rejoinder to Gearon is 'largely accurate'. In my response to Lewin, I spell out my views on the aims of religious education and political interference in religious education, making reference to my own writing about the negative effects of the UK Government's Prevent policy (Jackson, 2017a).

ⁱⁱ In his reply to my article in the *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, Gearon identifies the Council of Europe as a body which funds research (Gearon, 2018 *, *). The Council of Europe is a human rights organisation with 47 member states, founded in 1949, and has no role whatsoever in funding external research projects.

^{iv} Other examples of constructive interdisciplinary collaboration include recent research on collective worship (Cumper and Mahwhinney 2018) and the work of the Commission on Religious Education in the UK (Commission on Religious Education 2017).